

# Possibilities in Education and Training

Winter 2020



Pictured from left to right: Josh, Jessica (shown here with two of her coworkers) and Ty

## Community Ambassadors Spread Message of Inclusion

**Mike Hoenig**, *Program Coordinator*  
*University of Iowa Center for Disabilities and Development*

On Friday, November 1, I had the privilege of listening to six inspiring presenters tell their stories to residents and staff of the Woodward Resource Center (WRC). These dynamic presenters, all current or former participants in Iowa's Money Follows the Person (MFP) program, are aptly referred to as *Community Ambassadors*.

The Community Ambassador program is funded by the Iowa DD Council and managed by two MFP Transition Specialists, Jo Schumacher and Lori LaCarte. Its purpose is to train individuals who have successfully transitioned or their family members to describe the benefits of community living to residents of congregate facilities and their families.

# “Speaking out is a big privilege.” - Tyrome



Tyrome (Ty, pictured above) experienced a brain injury at birth. He lived in a variety of placements since age nine. At 19, he's thrilled to be living in a Carroll, Iowa apartment with the support of a friend named Tanner and his family. With funding from a Medicaid program known as the Consumer Choices Option, Tanner and his family assist Ty with cleaning, budgeting, social skills development and medication management.

“I got involved in this program because I want to tell people placed in facilities that they have the power to change their situation,” Ty says. “It gives me a chance to tell people what I've been through and what I've learned. Speaking out is a big privilege.”

The first six ambassadors to be trained include five individuals with disabilities and one family member. Ambassadors prepared for their November 1 presentation by completing a two-day training in late October.

“The training came from material that was developed by the Special Olympics North America Athlete Leadership program,” explained trainer Wendy Olinger, Director of Athlete Initiatives at Special Olympics Iowa. “We used the beginner Global Messenger training that teaches athletes how to give speeches and modified it to fit the needs of the Community Ambassadors. I worked with Jo and Lori to make sure that the material we presented was what they were looking for to create the right outcome for these individuals. Each person in the training and their staff took all of the information and put it to use to help the community ambassadors put their story on paper.”

“The Community Ambassadors were so amazing during the

training,” continued Olinger. “They were like sponges, eager to learn the best way to share their story. Each person listened to the critique of the staff members and used that to better their presentation. Everyone had such an open mind when it came to explain how their presentations could be enhanced. Each person just needed a little confidence in themselves to not be ashamed of where they had been and where they are now. You could tell when they talked about their past how some situations were not pleasant to talk about but when talking about their present situation, they were confident and happy to share specific details. Each community that these ambassadors live in is a better place because of them. They should be proud of what they have accomplished and will continue to accomplish.”

The skills learned at the late October training were on full display as each presenter told his or her story. Allow me to introduce each presenter along with key takeaways which s/he shared:



During his presentation, Ty told his audience that his mother pulled him out of his third grade classroom in northwest Iowa and drove him to a placement five hours away. "I was defiant when I was younger," Ty explained. "I've learned that fighting doesn't work out in the real world." We all have our situations, and at some point we have to change if we want things to change. Getting out had a big impact on my life, and it can happen for you if you choose."

Originally from Tennessee, Josh now lives on a farm near Runnells, Iowa with Michele and her family. The family receives funding to support Josh through Medicaid's Host Home program.

"I got hit by a truck in 1985," explains Josh. "I became the first childhood trauma patient at Vanderbilt in Nashville. I came to Iowa about five years ago when Dad was dying. My brother lives here, and he put me in a group home at Mosaic. There were some good things about it, but I was sure glad when Jo came to help me move! At Mosaic, I had just a little world of one room. On the farm, my world has opened up. Now I'm an inspirator!"

During his presentation, Josh told his audience, "I now have a real life. I go to church, go bowling, and go out to eat. I have a girl friend. My host family is building a new home, and they're installing an elevator for my wheelchair! Looks like I'm sticking around!"

Jessica, AKA "Awesome Jess," works full-time at Walgreens "babysitting a cash register eight hours a day." She lives in Urbandale with her friend Bev who provides support through the Host Home program.

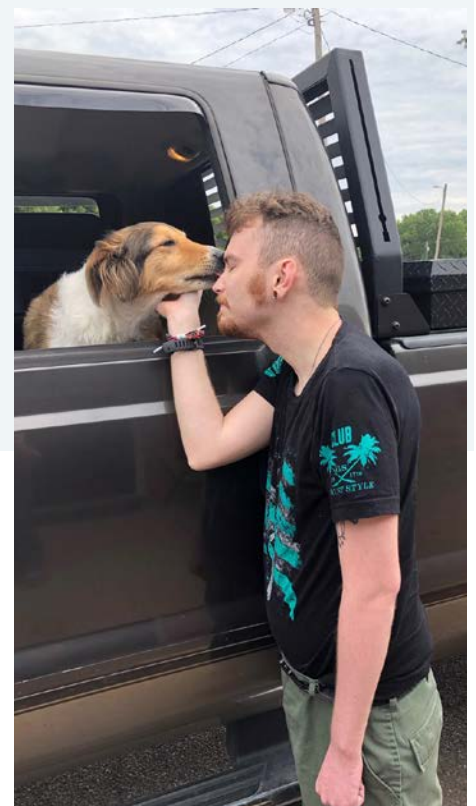
"I moved to Altoona in 2007," explains Jessica. "After graduating from Southeast Polk High School, I lived in an ICF (Intermediate Care Facility) for a year. SueAnn Morrow from MFP helped me get my job. I decided to become a Community Ambassador to help other people with special needs and reach out to others. The training I received was very informational and helped me gain confidence."

"Awesome Jess" kept us in stitches during her presentation with one-liner after one-liner. As she began a sentence which was intended to describe her dream job, she dropped her notes. The end result: "My dream job ... is

not to drop the paper on the floor!" On a serious note, Jess told her audience that "the most important thing is advocating," and "do what you dream of."

Michael sustained a brain injury as the result of a gunshot wound. He lives on his own in an apartment in Muscatine with primary support coming from his mother.

"I lived at On with Life in Ankeny for about a year after my brain injury. I knew that I wanted to get back home to Muscatine, so I checked myself into a nursing home there. That's where Lori connected with me. MFP helped me find my apartment. I decided to become a Community Ambassador because I want to help others-and I think it'll look good on my college application."



**"Bad days are going to happen, but you have to look forward to what's next." –Michael**

## “It’s important to be honest about the challenges”. –Steph

Three days removed from major surgery, Michael told his audience, in a calm and encouraging voice, “Bad days are going to happen, but you have to look forward to what’s next. As for me, I’m hoping to go back to school to pursue a journalism degree.”

Frequent *Possibilities* readers will remember Brady, who was featured in our Spring 2019 issue, archived at <http://www.disabilitytraining.org/our-newsletter/>. An active community member, Brady works two jobs, plays guitar for his church’s praise band, and serves on the Iowa DD Council. He viewed becoming a Community Ambassador as yet another opportunity to grow and encourage others. He shared his musical talent by providing entertainment as individuals arrived for the presentation.

“If someone had told me four and a half years ago that I’d be standing up here talking to you,” Brady told the Group, “I wouldn’t have believed them. You can’t change what happened in the past. Think toward your future.”

Steph has three children, including a daughter, Allison, with autism. Allison moved to a community placement at age 18 with support from MFP.

“Allison’s first experience in the community was a good one,” Steph told me. “She had good roommates and staff. Unfortunately, she had to move, and things aren’t working out as well.”

Steph became a Community Ambassador at the suggestion of Lindsey Robertson, MFP Program Manager, to provide a guardian’s perspective and to relate to other parents considering community placement. During her presentation, she described Allison’s various living situations, noting that staff at Allison’s present house are not as interactive as in previous locations. “It’s important to be honest about the challenges,” she explained.

During the debriefing after the training, Transition Specialist Schumacher offered a reminder about stipends. I was surprised, as not one Community Ambassador mentioned financial incentive as a reason for getting involved with the program during his/



her interview with me. Clearly, mentoring and encouragement of peers is incentive enough!

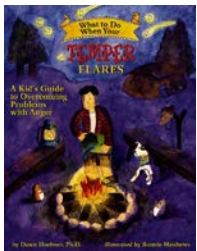
As you read this, a second presentation will have been conducted at the Glenwood Resource Center. At least three more presentations are planned for Spring 2020. “We want to do more if at all possible,” explains Transition Specialist LaCarte. “The Community Ambassadors have a story to tell, and we’re going to do all we can to help them tell it.”

## Accessibility Improvements

Mitch DeFauw, *Disability Resource Librarian*

The Center for Disabilities and Development (CDD) is happy to announce the installation of new shelves in our Disability Resource Library. We now have new shelves for our professional reference books, DVDs, and additional outwards facing bookcases to showcase our different disability story books, all which are separated by subject (autism, ADHD, etc). Not only do these additions allow for more space for more books, but the additional replacement of the center shelves allows more space for patients with wheelchairs, walkers, and other such aids. It is our hope that these new changes showcase the CDD's commitment to develop quality resources for parents, children, and professionals, while also promoting accessibility for all children and adults alike. For more information on what new material has been added to the DRL collection, please see some examples below.

### What to Do When Your Temper Flares, a Kid's Guide to Overcoming Problems with Anger by Dawn Huebner.



"This book guides children and their parents through the cognitive-behavioral techniques used

to treat problems with anger. Engaging examples, lively illustrations, and step-by-step instructions teach children a set of "anger dousing" methods aimed at cooling angry thoughts and controlling angry actions, resulting in calmer, more effective kids. This interactive self-help book is the complete resource for educating, motivating, and empowering children to work toward change."

### Help Your Dragon Deal with Anxiety by Steve Herman



"Having a pet dragon is very fun! He can candle a birthday cake, light a campfire, or so many other cool

things...But what if your dragon is constantly worrying about so many things? What if he's worried about his math test even though he has studied very hard? *What if your dragon is always asking about "What If"?* What should you do? You teach him how to deal with his anxiety!"

### The Rosie Project by Graeme Simsion

"An international sensation, this hilarious, feel-good novel is narrated by an oddly charming

and socially challenged genetics professor on an unusual quest: to find out if he is capable of true love."

### The Great Katie Kate Explains Epilepsy by M. Maitland DeLand



"This superhero saga provides an entertaining and indispensable tool for parents and medical professionals who

are seeking a positive way to help young epilepsy patients understand their condition and deal with their fears. As a well-respected physician who specializes in the treatment of women and children, the author presents challenging medical concepts in clear, accurate, and understandable prose."

### Fifteen Things They Forgot to Tell You About Autism by Debby Elley



"From sharing the joy of yodeling around shops at the weekend, to finding creative ways to communicate with

both her verbal and her non-verbal sons, Debby Elley gives practical and fun tips for everyday living and shows that being autistic is just another way of being. Both witty and candid, the book discusses labels, meltdowns, acceptance, happiness and much more."

*Possibilities in Education and Training* is a quarterly publication of University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital Center for Disabilities and Development, Iowa's University Center for Excellence on Developmental Disabilities. It is an outreach initiative of the Conner Training Connection, a program funded by the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) to support the transition of individuals with disabilities from congregate to community-based settings.

Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.

– Francis of Assisi

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